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Do Not Be Conformed to This Age

BIBLICAL UNDERSTANDINGS
OF MINISTERIAL LEADERSHIP

The narratives from the various seminaries that participated in The Lexington Seminar contain many similarities, one of which is that they describe the ways in which seminaries do not meet student expectations. In the narrative of the Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary (1999),¹ for example, a commuter student feels left out and unimportant, at least in part because of the ways in which various responsibilities beyond seminary make her work at the seminary more difficult. Similarly, Professor Jones at Church Divinity School of the Pacific (2001) struggles through multiple interruptions to give proper attention to a commuter student who feels the institution makes unreasonable demands on her. (Yet the student shows an unwillingness to do the simple thing—check her campus mailbox—that might alleviate some of her conflicts with the school.)

Such dissatisfactions are further complicated when students do not meet faculty expectations. For example, one of the students who interrupts Professor Jones at CDSP cannot write English proficiently enough to complete a paper for class and does not seem willing to be available when the professor can work with him. In the narrative of United Theological Seminary of the Twin Cities (2001), students seem to evaluate their experience of seminary by the extent to which their life story is affirmed. Finally, many students perceive no connection between their seminary education and their work as ministers. The students in the Lexington Theological Seminary narrative (2002) find little use

for theology, and those recent graduates of Calvin Theological Seminary (1999) who send a critical letter to its president find no connection between academic work and pastoral ministry. There is, it seems to them, too much emphasis on church history, biblical languages, and theology and too little on the practical skills needed for pastoral ministry. Eastern Baptist Theological Seminary (2000) hears similar concerns and considers “agenda-setting” courses to show students the relevance of what they are learning. And though the students at Claremont School of Theology (2000) are more accepting of critical scholarship, they still have a difficult time knowing what to do with it.

I think these concerns (institutions not meeting student expectations, students not meeting faculty expectations, the need to have one’s experience heard and affirmed, and the perceived gulf between academics and pastoral work) are related to one another and to understandings of ministry.

THE PROBLEM OF PERSONAL EXPERIENCE

Most students coming to seminary at this time put an extremely high value on personal experience, which means that their personal stories, whether we think about them as autobiography or as faith journey, contribute in extraordinarily powerful ways to their understanding of Christian faith and ministry. Indeed, their personal experience often seems to have more genuine authority for them than the Christian community’s communal experience in the present, in the tradition, or in Scripture. That is, of the Wesleyan Quadrilateral’s four sources of revelation, they privilege experience, particularly private experience, to such an extent that the other sources are largely irrelevant. Placing such a high value on their individual, personal, and private experience also means that meeting their own needs is a high priority. Thus, they come with high expectations for what institutions should do for them and find it an institutional failure when things do not conform to their specific needs or expectations.

Such an outlook is hardly unique. Rather, this looking to one’s own experience and evaluating other things primarily by whether they meet one’s own individual needs is a broad cultural trend that reflects our culture’s narcissism and extreme individualism. In the culture of the United States, the wants of an individual are often privileged above the needs of the community. While this began with concerns about the disadvantaged, it has become a cultural outlook that has many less helpful consequences.

One of the important consequences for those of us involved with seminary education is that it has led to a broad relativism, particularly where religious beliefs are concerned. The authority of one’s conscience, an important element in much Protestant thought, including the tradition of my denomination, has

become the arbiter of all things to the extent that rational argumentation about important religious issues is nearly impossible. When there is disagreement about important matters, those who rely heavily on unexamined personal experience and individual conscience simply resort to comments about truth being different for each person or about their opinion being as good as the other person's because it is theirs. It is not unusual in such company to hear much talk about the importance of not judging. Such a retreat from rational argumentation renders much of seminary education meaningless. It is easy to see why theology and biblical exegesis are not important once we note that they are outside the person's individual experience. What students who place such value on personal experience want, what they *feel* they need, are tools with which to "be with people" who are suffering or celebrating. They do not think these tools need to be rooted in any theology beyond that of personal experience, which they assume to be self-interpreting. These students want to help people by simply sharing their own experiences with them. The altruism of this outlook is commendable, but it is not sufficient for faithful, effective Christian ministry.

Such unreflective reliance on personal experience also runs counter to the desire of seminaries to be institutions that engage in formation. Formation implies change; it means that students are being led to conform to particular ways of being. Because they are being asked to change, it may well be that students will sometimes feel that their needs are not being met. Perhaps this is a necessary part of formation. Those being led to a more reflective faith will sometimes yearn for that simple faith they once experienced and relied on, that sense of certainty and security (and I can confess this from personal experience). But seminaries are not intended to be havens for unscrutinized experience, but rather communities that enable examination of one's faith and help one find ways to be in God's presence while undertaking the intellectual task that leads to the work of ministry. Seminary faculties, therefore, need to be clearer about their expectations and the reasons for those expectations.

These comments are not meant to denigrate our students' intellects or motivations. Our students are people of our culture, not so unlike those who enter many educational institutions (Klimoski 2003). As teachers and institutions we need to accept that this is the starting point with many of our students. Therefore, we must find ways to reach them. This does not mean that we should be satisfied with their overly personal way of perceiving and making meaning in the world. We must help them become more reflective about their experiences. In some way, we must help them use their experience as an entrance into the breadth and richness of the Christian tradition rather than as the only basis for their faith and ministry. We need to find a way, in the words of Paul, to "transform [their] minds"—and perhaps our own as well. If semi-

naries wish to prepare leaders in ways that are consistent with the gospel, they must provide their students with a broader base than personal experience for the foundation of their ministry. An important part of this task is coming to a clear understanding of the nature of ministry. Recapturing something of a biblical understanding of ministry may help us integrate theological curriculum and help make it important for our students.

A corollary of the unexamined emphasis on one's own experience is the belief that one is called to the ministry because one's experience of God is superior to that of others. Thus, the pastor, by virtue of this experience of God, deserves deference and expects parishioners to do as she says and acknowledge that she is the one who knows the will of God. But such understandings of ministry are not consistent with the ways ministry is envisioned in the New Testament. To help students become the leaders the church needs, we must give careful thought to what it means to be a pastor. The New Testament is an important starting point for this renewed reflection on the nature of Christian leadership.

The early church needed to find ways of ordering its communities that were consistent with the Christian faith. Therefore, most of the New Testament's explicit discussions of leadership appear in the Pauline letters, in contexts in which there were active debates about the sort of leadership the church should adopt. The church explicitly rejected some models of leadership and affirmed others. Of course, practices of ordination have developed in differing ways in various confessional traditions, but all seek to be compatible with what the Gospels give us as the teaching of Jesus and with the interpretations of leadership found throughout the New Testament. Thus, it is important to root our understandings of ministry in Scripture.

LEADERSHIP IN PAUL

Paul's churches existed in a cultural environment in which the dominant model of leadership placed leaders above others in a hierarchical order in which those above exercised dominance over those below. Those above expected privilege, deference, and honor from those below them. Leaders were expected to possess a powerful demeanor and thereby embody the image of success and be able to impose their will on others.² Because this was the culturally accepted manner of leadership, Paul's converts looked for these traits in their leaders as well. Paul, however, repeatedly rejects such leadership.

The Corinthian church, in particular, fell victim to oppressive forms of leadership. They accepted their culture's understanding of leadership without recognizing that it was incompatible with the gospel. The Corinthians were

drawn to accept leadership from those who looked impressive and successful and those who possessed powerful personalities. In 1 Corinthians 1–4, Paul rejects this understanding of leadership, arguing that a Christian understanding of leadership does not include exercising dominance or control over others. Paul calls himself and other leaders servants rather than superiors.

In 1 Corinthians 12–14, Paul celebrates the diversity of the gifts with which God had blessed the church, calling all gifts of the Spirit ministries (12:5).³ Every Christian has a gift by virtue of possessing the Spirit, so every Christian has a ministry and needs to participate in the church's ministry. Having a gift and exercising it in the context of the church is a constituent part of being a Christian for Paul, so being gifted by God does not set one apart from other Christians. Paul demands that every gift be honored and every gift be exercised for the good of the church.

First Corinthians failed to change its recipients' view of leadership and ministry enough to enable them to reject teachers who arrived in Corinth soon after it. In the letters of 2 Corinthians, Paul opposes these traveling preachers who legitimate their claims to leadership by pointing to their powerful personalities and presence, along with their superior experiences of the presence of God. They claim that God's Spirit dwells in them in a way that sets them apart from others and so requires others to defer to them, even acquiesce to their demanding demeanor. They argue that their air of superiority and success is a demonstration of God's power.

Such understandings of ministry bring into the church models of ministry that are incompatible with the gospel. Paul draws a stark contrast between his theology of ministry and that of those he will call "super-apostles" (2 Cor. 11:5) by saying, "we do not preach ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord and ourselves as your slaves for the sake of Jesus" (4:5). When he says his competitors "preach themselves," he is referring to their assertion that the Spirit enables their impressive demeanor and gives them the trappings of success. After all, this is the Spirit of the God who raised Jesus from the dead. Of course, God continues to work in God's ministers in this powerful manner. But Paul rejects this train of thought. He makes his point dramatically in 4:7: "we have this treasure in clay jars, so that it may be clear that this extraordinary power belongs to God and does not come from us." When Paul compares ministers to "clay jars," he compares them to the styrofoam cups of the day. Such "clay jars" were the cheap, expendable containers of the first century. This is how the lives of ministers compare with the precious gospel they proclaim.

Far from appearing to bask in the power of the resurrection, the lives of ministers are manifestations of the death of Jesus. In bearing troubles with faith they bring life to the congregation. The task of representing the death of Jesus for the good of the congregation is not unique to ministers. It is part of the

life of all Christians (see 1 Thess. 2:14). The distinction between ministers and others is that the hardships of ministers are more public. Paul argues that ministers accept this role for the good of the church, so that praise to God will increase as people see them endure such difficulties and yet retain their faith.

Paul makes a startling statement about his relationship with his church in 2 Corinthians 4:5; he speaks of himself as “your slave.” Paul often calls himself a servant of Christ. When referring to himself in this way he usually uses the word *diakonos*, the word from which we get “deacon.” The basic meaning of *diakonos* is “servant.” However, it identifies the person neither as a slave nor as servile. Paul uses this word throughout 2 Corinthians to speak of ministry, that of apostles, other leaders, and of the whole church (8:4; 9:1, 12).

But Paul does not use *diakonos* in 4:5; rather he calls himself the Corinthians’ *doulos*. The basic meaning of *doulos* is “slave,” and it usually does connote servility and hard labor, especially in comparison with *diakonos*. Among the many times Paul refers to himself as a servant of Christ, he uses *doulos* only three times to do so (Rom. 1:1; Gal. 1:10; Phil. 1:1). So it is rather astonishing that he calls himself a *doulos*, slave, of the Corinthian church. While the “super-apostles” assert authority over the congregation, Paul adopts the opposite position: He is their slave. This is the demeanor and the relationship between leaders and the rest of the church that Paul’s understanding of the gospel requires.⁴ Paul can think of himself and speak of himself as a slave because he does not confuse the status or importance of the minister with the importance of the message. In practice this distinction is sometimes difficult to maintain, but it is essential.

Writing in the midst of a fierce debate, Paul makes some exaggerated statements about ministry and suffering. He has no desire to suffer and does not think ministers should seek it out. On the other hand, ministers should be willing to suffer for the good of the church. Furthermore, they must not set themselves apart from others as superior in their experience of God. Such voluntary humility violated the first century’s standards for leadership, much as it conflicts with ours. But Paul argues that this type of ministry is consistent with the gospel of the crucified Christ. Were Paul to address the topic of ministry in a less polemical context, mutual subordination would probably be a significant theme, as it is in his discussion of relationships within the church throughout 1 Corinthians. This would be the case because he expects all Christians, not just leaders, to reflect the crucified Christ in their lives. His churches’ willingness to accept their culture’s view of leadership required Paul to place the emphasis where he does. This polemical setting, however, demonstrates that some understandings of leadership are incompatible with the gospel.

JESUS ON LEADERSHIP

The Gospels relate the stories about and sayings of Jesus as they do to lead their readers to adopt a particular outlook on a given question. Given that all four Gospels have Jesus address the nature of leadership within the Christian community, it is probable that there were discussions in their communities about appropriate forms of Christian leadership. So these texts offer some guidance as we formulate a theology of ministry.

Leadership is among the many things the Twelve misunderstand in the Gospel of Mark. When Jesus asks who the disciples believe he is, Peter replies that Jesus is the Christ. Jesus acknowledges this identity and then tells them that when they get to Jerusalem he will be killed but then rise. When Peter rejects this understanding of Jesus' ministry, Jesus calls him Satan. In 9:30–32 Jesus again tells them that when they arrive in Jerusalem he will be arrested, killed, and then raised on the third day. Mark says the disciples do not understand but are, understandably, afraid to ask for clarification. Perhaps to demonstrate just how little they understand the meaning of Jesus' mission and ministry, Mark immediately has the disciples argue about who would be greatest in the kingdom of God. So when Jesus proclaims his rejection and death, they respond by arguing about status and privilege. Jesus responds to their dispute by asserting that anyone who wants to be great in his kingdom must become a servant to all, even to those with no status (that is, children; 9:35–37). But the disciples' desire for status will not be rebuffed so easily. John now tells Jesus that they had seen someone they did not know exorcising demons in the name of Jesus, and because he was not in their group, they commanded him to stop. Essentially, John responds to Jesus' rejection of claims to status within the apostolic company by suggesting that even if they cannot claim status over one another, they as a group are at least superior to those not in their group. But Jesus says no. Rather, God will reward anyone who does good in Jesus' name (9:38–41).

The next time Jesus predicts his suffering, death, and resurrection, Mark has James and John surreptitiously ask Jesus for the highest positions in the kingdom (10:32–45). The juxtaposition of these attempts to attain status with Jesus' explication of the end of his ministry implies that the desire to claim authority is diametrically opposed to the meaning of the life and ministry of Jesus; claiming status and privilege have no part in the kind of leadership that follows the example of Jesus or understands his ministry. On this occasion Mark has Jesus contrast the way authority is exercised in their culture with what Jesus expects of leaders. In their culture, leaders impose their will on those below them and exercise lordship. Jesus says it must be radically different in God's

kingdom. In this realm, those who want to be great must act as servants (*diakonos*) to others, and the one who wants the highest position is to be the slave (*doulos*) of everyone. The use of *doulos* is again arresting. Jesus commands anyone who wants to be the recognized leader, even among the leaders, to act as and to understand himself as the most lowly. This is the only acceptable understanding of leadership in the Christian community because it follows the example of Jesus, the one who came to serve others and to give his life for them.

The account of this story in Matthew 20:20–28 makes the same point with the same shift from *diakonos* to *doulos*. Luke's account of the dispute about who would be the greatest, which immediately follows the institution of the Lord's Supper (22:24–30), makes the point by contrasting cultural models of leadership with Christian leadership.

John's account of Jesus washing the disciples' feet also includes a lesson on leadership. John begins this story by saying that Jesus now knows that God has given him all things, that he had come from God, and was about to return to God (13:2–3). When Jesus recognizes this fully, he performs the most menial of tasks. Washing feet was a servile task, one often performed by a slave. John connects Jesus' confidence in his relationship with God and the coming crucifixion to this task. Such service to others is the symbolic enactment of the ministry of Jesus.

In this act Jesus sets an example for all, but most directly this is an example for leaders to follow. As leaders they are to imitate Jesus by performing menial tasks for others. Jesus washing the disciples' feet is a symbolic enactment of the type of leadership Jesus expects within the church.

In the Gospels, Jesus consistently rejected understandings of leadership that claim privilege and status. By example and explicit teaching, he denounced the ways authority was exercised in their world; he advocated a theology of leadership, of ministry, that disallowed claims of power and demands of deference. He called for a theology of leadership that rests on his example and the values of the kingdom of God. Leaders who adopt this outlook will accept menial tasks, knowing that being a servant imitates Christ more than being served.

LEADERSHIP IN THE LATER PAULINE LETTERS

The letters of 2 Thessalonians and Ephesians also contribute to our understanding of ministry in important ways. But before we turn to those texts, a comment on the Pastoral Epistles is in order.

The Pastoral Epistles are often understood to represent a shift within Christianity toward hierarchy and the kinds of ministry and leadership that the Gospels and Paul seem to reject. But in some ways this contrast has been overdrawn. The Pastorals expect Christians to respect and honor those who are

elders and deacons, but the Pastorals do not give these leaders power or authority. Indeed, there is little description of their duties or responsibilities. Instead, there is a rather extensive list of qualifications, perhaps suggesting that their primary duty is to be an example of the way the gospel forms a person's life. Thus, a primary way that elders and deacons lead in the Pastorals is by example.

Whether written after Paul's death or by Paul soon after 1 Thessalonians, 2 Thessalonians addresses issues relevant to our development of a theology of ministry. The primary purpose of 2 Thessalonians is to reject the teaching of some who hold an overrealized eschatology. As 2 Thessalonians characterizes it, they claim that "the Day of the Lord has already come" (2:2). A group in the church that 2 Thessalonians addresses has redefined the Second Coming so that it is not a cosmic event witnessed by all, but rather a personal experience of the Lord that only some have received. Those with this experience claim spiritual superiority because they have a more intimate relationship with God. Who could be more qualified to minister to the needs of others than Christians with such experiences of God? Because of this experience, some among the Thessalonians have appointed themselves the spiritual leaders of the congregation and have left their former occupations to devote themselves fully to work within the church.⁵

The writer of 2 Thessalonians refuses to grant such people positions of leadership because they base their claim to leadership on their superior spiritual experiences, their participation in the Day of the Lord. He commands this church to repudiate them as leaders and even to refuse to include them in their circle of fellowship until they relinquish those claims to superiority, a repentance that must be accompanied by returning to their jobs.

The dispute that 2 Thessalonians joins, then, is in part about leadership. More particularly, it includes a discussion of what qualifies a person for positions of leadership. This letter rejects the idea that superior spiritual experiences qualify a person for a position of leadership in the church.

Ephesians celebrates the unity Christians possess in Christ as a unity that overcomes ethnic differences, one of the most basic differences in their existence. At the same time, it encourages its readers to live out this unity in their lives as the church because this unity manifests the multifaceted wisdom of God. Chapter 4 begins a series of discourses on the ways they are to live out this unity. Verses 1–16, the first in this series, explicate how the readers are to live in the Lord in a manner that is worthy of their calling (4:1). After affirming the unity of the church and enumerating the many things that create this unity, the writer asserts that Christ has given each member of the church a gift. Verse 11 contains a partial accounting of the gifts Christ brings to the church. The writer mentions apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers.

As we saw in 1 Corinthians 12–14, the church recognized from its earliest days that God gifted people in different ways, enabling each to perform particular tasks. Ephesians speaks within that tradition. Ephesians 4 emphasizes unity and identifies a common source for the variety of gifts in a way that is similar to the discussion in 1 Corinthians. Thus, even though its list of gifts is limited to those that entail leadership, this passage does not suggest that the people with these gifts should rule or dominate those with other gifts nor that a variety of other gifts does not exist. This is particularly clear when we remember that “pastors” probably refers to the elders of the congregation. Given the usage of this language elsewhere in the New Testament, that is the most probable meaning of “pastor” during this early period.⁶

For the present discussion, perhaps the most important point we may draw from Ephesians 4 is the purpose it gives for Christ’s distribution of these gifts. Christ gives these gifts of leadership so that the leaders may equip the saints for the work of ministry (v. 12), which assumes that all Christians have a ministry and are engaged in the work of ministry. This ministry of all the saints builds up the body of Christ, moving it toward its maturity in the likeness of Christ (vv. 12–13). Here the task of the leaders is preparatory to the basic ministries of the church. The leaders are to be engaged in work that enables the other members of the church to carry out their ministries.

Envisioning leadership as equipping directs attention to the tasks of teaching, encouraging, supporting, enabling, directing, convincing, and modeling. Such tasks are often more difficult, time-consuming, and frustrating than simply taking charge and completing the task at hand. But Ephesians calls for leadership that helps all claim their gifts from God and use them in the service of God, the church, and the world. This kind of leadership, in the words of Ephesians, “builds up the body of Christ.”

This is a very different model of leadership than the original readers of Ephesians (or we have usually) envisioned. In the model of Ephesians, *preparing others* to fulfill their ministries, including taking charge of ministry efforts or leading in the public roles or visible ministries, is the task of leaders. This kind of leading involves working behind the scenes to help others begin to carry out types of leadership and service that may have been heretofore the prerogative of the leader. Perhaps they became the prerogative of the pastor because no one else had been taught how to do them. This means that the ministry of the church has been diminished. When parts of the body of Christ wither from disuse or are never strengthened to perform the service that God has gifted them for, the church has been damaged. The immediate task may have been completed, but the church has not moved forward in its living out of the faith when the pastor simply does the task rather than equipping others to do it.

Seeing leadership, and particularly pastoral leadership, as equipping the rest of the church to fulfill its ministry entails a particular ecclesiology. Often, when churches do not own their own ministries, they begin to see the pastor as someone they hire to be religious for them. Then their church becomes just another charity and their faith has no power to help them interpret their lives and the world. Equipping members for ministry will help faith maintain its place in or move it to the center of the person's life where it can be a formative element in her construction of a worldview and meaning for herself within that world. Such "equipping [of] the saints" is the formidable and foundationally important task Ephesians sets before leaders.

SEMINARY AND MINISTRY

Having thus established a biblical foundation for a proper understanding of ministry, the question remains, What does seminary have to do with ministry? It is a question asked in many of the narratives. The Methodist student at Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary, the Episcopal student at Church Divinity School of the Pacific, those disengaged Baptist students at Eastern Baptist Theological Seminary, and the soccer-playing Disciples at Lexington Theological Seminary all want to know what the things they learn at seminary have to do with the work of ministry. The ways the New Testament addresses issues surrounding leadership have, I think, much to say to us about the nature of ministry and what seminary education needs to accomplish if it is to prepare students for faithful work in ministry.

As we have seen, much in the New Testament runs counter to the tendency to emphasize the special nature of the minister's relationship with God. The individual's experience of God is not, by itself, a sufficient basis for the ministry that the New Testament envisions. Believing that their call to ministry is based on an especially intimate experience of God will almost inevitably lead pastors to see themselves as superior to other Christians, and Paul certainly fought such understandings of leadership in 1 Corinthians.

Paul also saw undesirable connections between dwelling on one's own gifts, including claiming them as evidence of spirituality, and the egotism that claims superiority and demands recognition of status. To have a ministry that effectively represents the church and its ministry of Jesus Christ, pastors must have more than a claim that they are closer to God than others and so can mediate the presence of God to others who are less fortunate. Pastors must be vigilant to avoid falling prey to the alluring notion that they are spiritually superior. Avoiding this snare is almost impossible if pastors believe their decision to be

ordained and their work as pastors to be the manifestation of a more special experience of God. Those who think they are superior will find it difficult to sustain a ministry of being a servant of the church.

Perhaps the closest analogy to the current tendency to legitimate ministry on the basis of personal experience is the problem addressed in 2 Thessalonians. The writer of that letter rejects the Thessalonian leaders because they have legitimated their ministry by claiming a fuller experience of the presence of Christ in their lives. I think he would respond in similar ways to those who now rely on their personal experience as their primary basis for ministry. Such an understanding of ministry is not consistent with the gospel and its call to servanthood, because it includes, by definition, a claim to superiority. Therefore, we who teach in seminaries must help those training for the pastorate to understand that personal experience alone is not a sufficient basis for ministry. We must show them how the disciplines of seminary education will help them and their churches discern the voice of God. We must not simply take away what they thought was their reason for entering the ministry; we must help them think of ministry in new and richer ways, ways that are consistent with Scripture and meaningful for them and the church.

Students want and deserve to have their experiences honored, so seminary faculties must find ways to value their students' experiences while not allowing unexamined experiences to retain the central place they have previously held in students' thoughts. We need to help students like Julie at United Theological Seminary of the Twin Cities (2001) learn how to integrate their personal experience with what they are learning about other sources of revelation.

According to Ephesians, the work of leaders is to help others recognize their gifts and then to enable those people to use their gifts for the good of the church and the expansion of the borders of God's kingdom. This is demanding work! It is also work that requires the leader to be thoughtful enough that he can articulate reasons for what he does and thoughtful enough that he will be able to teach others how to engage in the meaningful work of ministry.

If preparing the saints to carry out their ministry is a primary task of the pastor, then teaching is a central element of pastoral ministry and Christian leadership. I think this understanding of pastoral ministry and leadership is not only coherent with the gospel and Scripture, it is also crucial in our cultural context, which has important parallels with the situation in which the church of the New Testament found itself. Now as then (perhaps always) there are competing interpretations of the world. Some of these interpretations are explicitly articulated and advocated by philosophers and religious propagandists; some are expressed in the culture's manner of life. After some time of not recognizing the ways that American culture was built on values that sometimes conflict with those of Christianity, the church has begun the work of critiquing the cul-

ture's outlook, seeking where we can participate in it and remain faithful to the gospel and where we must oppose it, or at least stand apart from it. This is profoundly spiritual and intensely intellectual work.

The church today exists in a world that offers many constructions of meaning. As it was in the ancient world, so now, some of these constructs are explicit. Philosophical schools develop different understandings of existence and advocate their view as the one that brings meaning to life, or perhaps exposes life as not being meaningful. Whichever they claim, they articulate a way to view the world that they claim is true. Postmodern relativists claim there is no single truth about the world (though they seem to hold that statement itself to be just such a truth), thus implying no meaning for existence is any more or less authentic than another and that all personal or cultural perspectives are equally valid. Various religious groups also offer different understandings of the events of the day, of history, of our existence. If Christians are to have a credible voice that has integrity, leaders must be able to help churches think through these options. Pastors need to be able, in an informed and articulate manner, to converse with competing ways of making meaning in the world. When so many options confront them, thinking Christians need to have reasons for being Christians. Those who would be pastors need to be expert analysts and interpreters of the world in which they exist. Such work is both intellectual and deeply spiritual.

If teaching, because it offers a means to understand the world and conduct one's ministry, occupies a place near the heart of pastoral ministry, seminary education is invaluable. Seminaries should be places that challenge students to engage those competing understandings of the world and come to understand the gospel and appropriate ways in which the gospel message should be expressed in the ministries of the church. To be the community's teacher, the pastor must not only know how to perform certain functions (whether liturgical or pastoral) but must be able to teach others to do them. Ninety hours of seminary education seems to offer far too few opportunities to accomplish all of this. But the first step is to demonstrate to our students that intellectual work is in fact spiritual work and that it is central to being a pastor. The letter to the president of Calvin Theological Seminary and the students who expected something very different at Austin Presbyterian and Lexington Theological Seminary saw academic and intellectual endeavors as distinct from, if not opposed to, spiritual growth. We need to demonstrate that these endeavors are not opposed but are indeed entwined. Perhaps the place to start is with an understanding of ministry such as that articulated in the New Testament. The understanding of leadership we have discovered there brings together the intellectual and spiritual; it identifies preparing others for their ministries as the spiritual task to which leaders are called. This could be a starting

point for helping our students see the connections between the more theoretical parts of seminary education and ministry. The narratives of Church Divinity School of the Pacific and Eastern Baptist Theological Seminary illustrate that this coherence of formation must be evident to both faculty and students if such an understanding of ministry is to shape our students.

Those of us who teach at seminaries, therefore, must reinvent the understanding of our vocation as a ministry. We do not simply perpetuate our discipline or increase knowledge of the world. Our primary task is that of preparing leaders for Christ's church. Thus, as seminary teachers we must regain sight of the fact that we are engaged in the task of equipping those who are to equip the saints for the work of ministry.

PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

We may begin helping our students find value in their theological education by having them first articulate and reflect critically on their own experience. Parts of Thomas Groome's (1980, 184–232) five-step process for religious education can be helpful to us at this point. Using a praxis-reflection model, he asserts that the first two steps in this process are clear articulation of present practice and critical reflection on that practice. A subsequent step is engaging Scripture and tradition with the understanding of oneself gained through critical reflection. Groome's method requires people to reflect on their current practices and setting.⁷

Entering seminary students often want to "tell their story," perhaps as a way to validate their decision to come to seminary. Rather than deny this impulse or encourage it uncritically, teachers can use the impulse to begin their students' engagement with the tradition. Students should be invited to tell their stories but also, following Groome's lead, to reflect on the social, personal, religious, and political influences that led them to accord their stories the meaning they now hold for them. While encouraging such analysis, teachers will probably need to reassure the students that the analysis does not invalidate their experience but helps them recognize that the experience itself and the meaning they have given it are produced, in part, by factors they may not have considered. Such analysis simply acknowledges that God's revelation to us always comes in a historical context.

If we think of Scripture and tradition as conscious and careful articulations of their writers' experiences of God in their own historical, social, and ecclesial contexts, the exercise of reflecting critically on their own experience may help students engage these foundations of seminary education. Scripture, theology, and church history can be presented as the struggle of God's people to understand and explicate their experience of God in their own cultural settings.

The vocabulary and critical methods of these disciplines may appear foreign to the students, but the struggle to clarify and articulate an understanding of God is one that can be made familiar. Furthermore, students can be led to see how a particular writer's understanding of God draws on previous writers to gain insight and clarity, even if that clarity is achieved by rejecting the previous writers' views. Thus, we show our students that knowing their predecessors may help them clarify and articulate their own experience as they recognize those writers as sources from which they have drawn ideas (even if unconsciously) and as conversation partners who can help them reject ideas with unacceptable consequences and sharpen good ideas. If the students can see the framers of the church engaged in the same tasks in which they are engaged, they may be moved to take them more seriously. Moreover, the students, in the process of their genuine engagement with these texts and ideas, will begin to grant them some authority.

In many ways, these will be lessons in humility and in counterculturalism. It is humbling to acknowledge that some authority stands over our personal experience. Many are not pleased to hear this message. To assert such a proposition runs counter to much we hear in our culture today, and convincing students (and ourselves) to submit to other authorities will not be accomplished in a single session. This work will entail redefining many things, even things as basic as spirituality. Such lessons will need to be repeated in many settings and disciplines if we expect formation to occur.

One way to decrease the difficulty of acknowledging other authorities is to raise examples that students will reject and then ask them to give reasons for their rejection. (I have in mind issues that energize students, such as social justice issues.) For example, few of our students are willing to accept that racism accords with the will and character of God. But as soon as they assert that one position is right for all, they have begun drawing on sources other than personal experience, and we must ask them to identify their sources of authority and think about how they are functioning. Then we must expect consistency from them. That is, we must push them to adopt a theological method (a way to use the elements of the Wesleyan Quadrilateral or some other paradigm) that they can use when approaching theological and ethical questions. Such encounters with how they actually use other sources when there are competing personal experiences will not automatically guarantee that students will be consistent in their thinking and begin to value other sources of revelation and theological reflection. But with the right help, they may begin to see the importance these sources of the faith have as they discern what it means to be Christian in their time and place.

Finally, some of the Seminar narratives speak of students who remain focused on their own experiences, particularly upon their own healing. The nar-

rative of United Theological Seminary of the Twin Cities (2001) exemplifies this as Julie and her colleagues think of their education in terms of what it has done for them as they recover from personal traumas or difficulties. As seminary teachers, we must seek ways to refocus the attention of those who are to be pastors. Clarity about the centrality of the good of the church, about a spirituality that often privileges the group over the individual, may help us talk to our students about the relative importance of their personal struggles. Such clarity might be modeled in the way we allow the content of our classes to be determined in part by the whole of the faculty, by the goals of the current curriculum, and by the needs of the students.

Internalizing the idea that the good of the group, the church, is a compelling truth of the Christian life was a difficult task for the Corinthians. Certainly it will be a difficult task for our students—and for some of us—but necessary nonetheless.

NOTES

1. All narratives cited in this book can be found in the Archives section of the Seminar's Web site: <http://www.lexingtonseminar.org/>.
2. See the summary of the cultural models of leadership in Clarke (2000, 1–141).
3. The NRSV renders the word, “services,” but the noun is *diakonia*, a cognate of *diakonos*. This is the word Paul uses most often to refer to ministry.
4. Compare Paul's use of the cognate verb, *douloō*, in 1 Cor 9, in which he gives himself as an example of someone who voluntarily surrenders his own rights, makes himself a slave, for the good of others (9:19).
5. The Thessalonian Christians would not be the first to leave their trade to become teachers of a new faith. This sometimes happened when a person accepted the teaching of the Cynics. While the other philosophical schools criticized them for this, it was still a well-known Cynic practice. For more detailed argument for this understanding of those opposed in 2 Thessalonians, see Sumney (1999, 229–252) and Malherbe (2000).
6. See 1 Pet 5:1–2 in which elders (*presbuteroi*) are told to “pastor” (NRSV: “tend”) the flock over which they have been appointed. The verb in 1 Pet 5 is the cognate of the noun “pastor.” Acts 17:28 uses the same verb to speak of the work of elders.
7. I thank my colleague Sharon Warner for her conversations about pedagogy and for directing me to Groome's work.